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German Methods of Using the  
Mother Tongue

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BY RICHARD JONES, PH. D.





*GERMAN METHODS OF USING THE MOTHER TONGUE.*

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One of the striking facts of these closing years of the nineteenth century is the extraordinary pre-eminence of Germany in the world of learning. In nearly every branch of knowledge the world's acknowledged authority is some German scholar. To a remarkable extent, the reason of which is not difficult to apprehend when one understands the conditions of success in German scholastic life, German scholars write the world's books; they write the books which are regarded as authorities throughout the civilized world, or upon which other books are based. Professor Bryce of Oxford has written of Germany as "the central country of Europe; the State which dominates continental politics; the nation which does the largest part of the intellectual work of the world." This is the nation of whose philosophy Gladstone of late said, that it "has in recent times largely dominated the thought of the world."

This is the reputation which German scholars have won, and which makes their contributions to the world's treasure-store of ideas worthy of study, and (after modifications to suit the different conditions of our American life) worthy, it may be, of adoption.

But have German scholars attacked this problem of the proper use and function of the mother tongue, the language and the literature, as an instrument in education? Yes, there has been, and there is now, great activity along this line of thought. The interest in the subject was heightened by the famous School Conference at Berlin in December, 1890, when the Emperor gave expression to the following sentiments: "The foundation of our Gymnasien must be German. It is our duty to educate young men to become young Germans, and not young Greeks and Romans. We must relinquish the basis which has been the rule for centuries, the old monastic education of the middle ages. These are no longer our standard. We must make German the basis, and German composition must be made the center around which everything else revolves."

The agencies for carrying on the discussion,\* with which I have become to some extent familiar, are: (1) books; (2) magazines or periodicals, which are the recognized "organs" of the teachers of German

\*For assistance in finding the best literature on the subject, I was greatly indebted to Herr Karl Rudert of the Royal Library at Dresden. His friendly assistance and kindly interest was more than the performance of his official duty; it was rather a graceful courtesy to a foreigner.

literature; (3) the programs of the Gymnasien, which are our annual school report, or college catalogue, with the addition of a more or less scholarly contribution to some phase of educational thought by some member of the faculty of the Gymnasium.

Of the books, I need add nothing further, except a remark as to their number and general excellence. They are, as a rule, written by men who have the German love for thoroughness, and who have been trained to know what thorough work is. Educational buncombe is usually appreciated at its real value by German schoolmen.

The standard of the German periodicals devoted to the subject of instruction in German is creditably high. It is as though the "Educational Review," edited by the scholar to whose admirable address we have just listened, were devoted entirely to the subject of instruction in English. One of the best of these German publications is the magazine "Zum Deutschen Unterricht," published in Leipsic, and edited by Dr. Otto Lyon of Dresden, whom I had the pleasure of hearing on this subject of instruction in German, before an association of the schoolmen of Saxony. The breadth of thought and grasp of his subject manifested by the speaker gave me the highest respect for a body of schoolmen which could provide from its membership a speaker able to dignify and exalt his theme. I had the courage to ask this specialist—to whom I was first referred by the well-known Prussian School Commissioner, Dr. Münch, and of whose general recognition in Germany as one of the great authorities on this subject I was assured by the Minister of Education of the kingdom of Saxony—I had the courage to ask Dr. Lyon to prepare for some American magazine an article embodying his views as to the function of literature in education, which article I offered to translate into English, and I am happy to say that he kindly consented to do so. This article will doubtless embody his ripened thought as to character-building through literature, patriotism as cultivated by literature, the imagination and the mental faculties in general as developed by literature; and, for the upper classes, the proper limits of discussion in the class-room and the proper methods of presentation of such themes as the poet's view of God and of his relation to his creatures, the poet's view of Nature and of our relation to her, the poet's view of freedom and of fate—whether, indeed, "Man is man, and master of his fate," or "It is the stars, the stars above that govern our conditions;" in short, what sort of literature we shall choose for the various periods in education, and how shall we treat the literature chosen and what mental discipline may be derived therefrom.

Another publication is especially worthy of mention here, though not devoted exclusively to instruction in German, the "Annual Report on Higher Education," edited by Prof. Conrad Rethwisch of the

Koenigl. Wilhelm Gymnasium of Berlin. This report gives a summary, written by a specialist, of the latest trend of thought in each subject of education, as Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, German, etc., with a list of the books and other publications which have appeared during the year. This annual report is a large volume of some 800 pages, and is in itself an eloquent testimonial to German interest in educational matters.

The third agency of discussion mentioned is the program, or annual catalogue. I have said that, included with the statistics of the Gymnasium there is a more or less scholarly discussion of some educational theme. It is not to be presumed that each one of the hundreds of programs which appear yearly contains a valuable contribution to the literature of education. And yet the existence of this opportunity for making known the results of scholarly work, together with the security of the tenure of office and the determining influence of a reputation for exact scholarship in securing promotion, are a unique stimulus to investigation. The scholarly German must investigate, and must publish his results, or he must perish. Did time allow me to enlarge upon this theme, I could illustrate the necessity, under which the worthily ambitious German scholar lives, for discovering new truth, for leading the new thought of the world; whereas, the success of English and American teachers depends, to a larger extent, upon personal qualities and social gifts, upon power in expounding and making attractive time-tried truths, the accumulated wisdom of the past.

Hence the activity of the printing press in Germany. Every man of influence is an author. When I had been in Germany but a short time and had not yet grasped the situation, I asked a young German professor whether he had as yet published any books. His reply was, "*Natürlich*," i. e., "To be sure." He would not have been made professor otherwise. In a country where so many of the ablest men are, like the Athenians, continually prospecting for new truth, there is likely to be occasional discoveries of real ore.

Here is a volume (Klussmann—"Systematisches Verzeichnis der Abhandlungen," etc.) giving the titles of the publications of the schoolmen during the five years, from 1886 to 1890, inclusive. Here are given the titles of several thousand programs, on all sorts of subjects connected with education; on pedagogy and method, on philology, literature, history, mathematics, the sciences, philosophy, ethics, theology, art, etc. Under literature and language are mentioned dissertations on English, French, German, Greek, Latin, Hindoo, Celtic, Hebrew, Italian, Provençal, Rätomanisch, Lettoslavische, the various dialects of each, their history, and the like diversions of the German teacher's leisure hours. Yet, notwithstanding

this mass of pedagogical material, one writer expresses the hope that his book on methods "will prove a life-preserver to the many young teachers who are thrown into the educational stream with the friendly advice: 'Now, swim!'" One can but wonder how much instruction in the art of swimming the thorough-going German would consider adequate prior to the young teacher's plunge into the stream of experience!

A similar catalogue is issued of the publications of the university men. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of the subject not therein set down, and thus made more difficult than ever to master, because some German university professor has been extending the known field of man's conquest into, what Carlyle called, "the circumambient realm of Nothingness and Night."

Of the programs of the schoolmen, here is one to which attaches a romantic sort of interest, inasmuch as it comes from Bingen on the Rhine:

A soldier of the legion lay dying in Algiers,  
There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears:  
But a comrade stood beside him, while his life-blood ebb'd away,  
And bent, with pitying glances, to hear what he might say.  
"Take a message and a token to some distant friends of mine,  
For I was born at Bingen,—at Bingen on the Rhine."

\* \* \* \* \*  
"I dream'd I stood with her and saw the yellow sunlight shine  
On the vine-clad hills of Bingen,—fair Bingen on the Rhine."

At Bingen, in the Rhine, just beneath the magnificent national monument erected by the nation to celebrate the realization, in 1871, of that dream of ages (so long but a beautiful dream), national unity, stands the stone tower where, according to tradition, the deeds of the wicked Bishop Hatto returned upon the doer, as described in Southey's poem, "God's Judgment on a Wicked Bishop." After an unfruitful summer, Bishop Hatto invited the poor to his barn, filled with last year's store, and "burnt them all," women and children, old and young. But the rats in thousands attack him in his tower.

They have whetted their teeth against the stones,  
And now they pick the bishop's bones;  
They gnawed the flesh from every limb;  
For they were sent to do judgment on him!

In this program we have this legend discussed in its historical, literary-historical and mythical aspects, with quotations from old Latin tomes (including what Tacitus has to say of Bingen on the Rhine), and a mass of footnotes substantiating the positions taken,

and an attempt made to give a local habitation and a name to that which some may have looked upon as a mere play of the poet's fancy.

A clearer idea of what is accomplished in a German gymnasium will be given by confining ourselves largely to the curriculum of a single typical school, whose course of study in German is given in detail, rather than by "turning over many books together." Here is the program for 1887, of the Koenigl. Friedrichs Gymnasium of Cassel. The instruction in German extends throughout the nine years of the course of study. The average age of the lowest class, Feb. 1, 1887, was ten and one-sixth years; of the highest class, nineteen and one-sixth years. In the Koenigl. Wilhelms Gymnasium of the same city, the average age of the lowest class, Feb. 1, 1892, was ten and one-half years; of the highest class, nineteen and seven-twelfths. In the Koenigl. Kath. Gymnasium of Cologne, Feb. 1, 1890, the same classes were eleven and one-half and twenty and one-half, respectively.

The students in the lowest class of the Koenigl. Friedrichs Gymnasium of Cassel recite in German three times per week; in all the grades between the lowest and the highest they recite in German twice a week, and in the highest class three times per week. The lowest class average age ten and one-sixth years, (they spent four years in the *volkschule*) have altogether thirty recitations per week, including drawing and gymnastics. Of these thirty recitations, nine are in Latin, four in mathematics, three in religious instruction, three in history and geography.

These ten-year-old boys study, under the subject of the mother tongue: (1) Spelling, including syllabication, the use of capital letters, etc. (2) Grammar, the parts of speech, declensions and conjugations in connection with Latin, and the simplest rules of syntax in connection with Latin. (3) Punctuation. (4) Reading. Here are given the names of twelve poems to be committed to memory during the year. Five of these are by Uhland, one by Schiller. Also, twenty two other poems to be read and thoroughly understood during the first year. There is here a recommendation that some of these also be committed to memory. There are also selections in prose to be read in connection with the other studies pursued: two selections in connection with history—the "Worship of the Gods by the Early Greeks" and "Orestes and Pylades," five selections in connection with science lessons; five selections in connection with geography; and eleven selections to be read in connection with botany.

We see at once the great advantage of a well-arranged plan for the reading. The course of study is thoroughly articulated. The reading is not haphazard and unconnected. With the history lessons are to be read selections from literature which elucidate the history



and are elucidated by the history; and the exact title of these selections and the page in the reader where they are to be found is given in the course of study. This reading is for ten-year-old boys.

The German method of reading literature, according to a well-digested plan and in articulation with other subjects, may well serve as a model to us. I remember a severe arraignment of the colleges of New England, for their requirements in English, by a contributor to the "Educational Review," who said, in substance: "It may seem an extreme statement, but I believe that if English literature is well taught in any preparatory school it is likely to be in spite of, rather than because of, the college requirements. Those requirements encourage the total neglect of the historical development of literature. They foster disconnected reading. The selections have no necessary connection with each other. The lists prepared by the committee of the commission of New England colleges have no sequence or congruity."

This charge is certainly important, if true. As to its justification, I offer no opinion. But its publication in a magazine of such standing is a consideration that must at least give us pause.

At the annual meeting of the realschule men of Saxony last October, I heard the report of a committee appointed to prepare a course of reading in English literature for the English courses in the realschule. After the report was read, the chairman asked for the plan on which the selections were made, remarking that he was unable to see on what principle these particular selections were chosen. To German schoolmen, accustomed to a plan in the reading matter and an articulation of studies, it was not a satisfactory answer to say that all the selections suggested were masterpieces of English literature. There is a choice even between masterpieces, for their value in elucidating other subjects of the curriculum, and there is a choice in the order in which masterpieces may be read. The report was not adopted.

But returning to the course in German in the Cassel school, we find in quinta (the second year of the course; average age of pupils, eleven and five twelfths years) eleven poems to be committed to memory, twenty others to be thoroughly studied, five prose selections illustrating Greek mythology and two illustrating Roman mythology to be read in connection with history, and twenty-one other selections to be read in connection with other subjects of the curriculum. In obertertia (fifth year of the course; average age, fifteen and one-half years) eight of the ten selections to be committed to memory are by Schiller, one by Uhland and one by Goethe. The Goethe selection is the "Erl Koenig."

At the close of obertertia, or in five years from the time the pupil entered, he has committed to memory 59 poems, has read thoroughly 83 others poems and 115 prose selections. Of these prose selections, some are by the great historians Mommsen, Ranke and Curtius. Others are by Freytag, Schiller, Goethe, and other writers of established reputation. And the reading has not been fragmentary and disconnected, but arranged according to a well-digested plan. For example, a portion of the prose reading in history in quarta (third year students; average age, twelve and three-fourths years) is the "Battle of Marathon," "The Athenian Assembly," "The Building of the Acropolis at Athens," "An Athenian Gymnasium," etc.

In obersekunda (the third year before graduation; average age, seventeen and one-half years) several of Goethe's poems are committed to memory, as well as some portions of his dramas which are read. The reading for this year is: Goethe's "Hermann and Dorothea," "Goetz von Berlichingen" and "Egmont;" Herder's "Der Cid" and Schiller's "Maid of Orleans."

There still remain two years of the course. In the first of these two years, portions of the early German literature are read: selections from the "Niebelungenlied," "Gudrun," "Parzival," some songs of Walter von der Vogelweide, selections from Luther, Hans Sachs, Fischart, Opitz, Fleming, Haller, Klopstock ("Odes" and a portion of the "Messias"), Lessing's "Minna von Barnhelm," and a portion of the "Laokoön" and the "Hamburg Dramaturgie," Schiller's "Bride of Messina" and "Wallenstein." The portions of the above to be committed to memory are indicated.

During the last year, Goethe and Schiller are read and the history of German literature is studied, especial emphasis being placed upon the great names.

I cannot now enter upon the large field of discussion among German schoolmen, as to how Goethe and Schiller and literature in general should be read, and to what extent the teacher of literature should be also a teacher of philosophy. I have heard in German class-rooms elaborate expositions of philosophical systems, given by professors of literature on the ground that certain philosophical conceptions are fundamental to a proper understanding of great literature. If these expositions of philosophical themes are fairly understood by the pupils, there can be no doubt that literature is richer in content to them in consequence thereof. And even if not fully comprehended by young men from nineteen to twenty years of age, these outlines of philosophical thought, these glimpses into the realm of great ideas, must prove suggestive and stimulating.

I was especially interested in a recitation conducted by Dr. H. Unbescheid of the annenrealschule of Dresden, whose book "Beitrag

zur Behandlung der Dramatischen Lektüre" ("A Contribution to the Treatment of Dramatic Literature") obtained for him the degree of doctor of philosophy from the University of Leipsic without an examination, an honor as well deserved as it is rare. The recitation in question, an excellent one in every respect, was particularly valuable because, in addition to the admirable presentation of new subject-matter by the instructor, there was enough of recitation by the pupils to enable the visitor to judge to what extent they had assimilated the previous instruction given them as to the structure of the drama, its laws and its nature.

There is thus given in many schools, in connection with the literature in the latter part of the course, an introduction to philosophy to give the student some idea of the philosophical conceptions necessary for the understanding of great poetry. Other schools begin in untersekunda (or four years before graduation) a course of (1) a general view of the history of German literature, (2) chronological readings of great poems in translation, beginning with the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" and closing with the masterpieces of modern literature. But the course I have given from the Cassel curriculum may be regarded as a fair average course.

Surely the course here outlined ought to give a boy a fair introduction to German literature. The course is well planned to include portions of all the great writers of Germany, and a fair amount is read. And the work is not optional. This is the course in German of a school which devotes seventy-seven periods to Latin for every twenty-one to German. It gives forty periods to Greek, thirty-four to mathematics, twenty-eight to history and geography combined, and twenty-one to French. Latin, Greek, mathematics, history and geography, each fill more periods during the nine year's course than does German. If the work done in every department is in proportion to the periods given to it, recalling the great amount of work accomplished in the twenty-one periods given to German, we may well believe the cry of "overpressure" abundantly justified. But however that may be, the important fact is that these masterpieces are read, and read according to a plan, the fundamental principle of which is concentration and articulation; and, furthermore, that in Germany it is an educational axiom that every recitation in every subject is a recitation in German.

The directions in connection with the course of study suggest that, in spelling, ten new words each day is sufficient, and that five to ten minutes will suffice for the recitation. The purpose of instruction in grammar is, to quicken the language sense of the pupil so that he will unconsciously choose the right form of expression, and yet he must not be satisfied with a mere mechanical distinction of true from

false, but must know the reason why. This instruction in German grammar begins in the lowest class; but less stress is laid upon rules in sexta and quinta, the two lowest classes. In quarta and tertia (average age from twelve and three-fourths to fifteen and one-half years) syntax in its essentials is systematically taught, but though instruction in grammar proper closes with tertia (average age fifteen and one-half years), yet, as opportunity offers in the reading, references are made to peculiarities of grammatical construction.

An important part of the instruction in the use of the mother tongue is composition work and essay writing. The purpose of the essay is to educate the pupils in a well-ordered, correct, clear, appropriate exposition of worthy thoughts lying within the field of their intellectual vision and the circle of their experience. The principle governs, then, in every grade, that the subject-matter of the essay shall be drawn from the subject-matter of instruction given in that grade. This principle determines for every grade the choice of theme. Just as articulation of studies and concentration—the keynote of the German curriculum—determines the choice of reading matter for every grade, so they determine also the subject of the composition work for that grade.

In the lower grades there is much writing from dictation, to give the pupil practice in punctuation, the use of capital letters, and in spelling. Or the pupil writes from memory matter that he has read. In the lower grades, accuracy of expression is the chief end in view; in the higher grades, logical arrangement and rhetorical excellencies are emphasized. It is recognized that there cannot be clear writing without clear thinking, and that just as every instructor in every subject is an instructor in German, so every instructor deserves his share of praise or blame for excellency or deficiency in the composition class. An essay is required of every pupil, the period varying in different schools from once a week to once a month.

Subjects for essays are often suggested in the course of study. Themes connected with literature seem to be favorites. Among the subjects proposed for the upper class in a 1892 program we find "Max Piccolomini's relations to Octavio," "The National Importance of Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*," "What are the Acts in the *Philoktet* of Sophocles, and to What Extent do They Correspond to the Laws of the Drama." Of twenty subjects suggested for sekunda in this program, fourteen are literary themes. Here is a program published in 1892, containing seven essays intended as models for the students of the upper class. One of these discusses "Hamlet," and all treat of literary themes. In speaking of the correction of essays, one writer, in the spirit of Portia's thought, that "the quality of mercy is not strained," suggests that the pupil's essay, when returned to

him, ought not, if it can be avoided, to be so marked over with corrections in red ink that it resembles nothing so much as a blood-stained battlefield.

As to the importance in education of the composition work, President Eliot of Harvard University, in expressing to the students of Smith College his own conviction, that "the great object of all education is to learn how to speak and write well the mother tongue," is in harmony with the latest educational thought of Germany—a thought expressed at the Berlin School Conference of 1890 by Emperor William in the statement that "German composition must be made the center around which everything else revolves."

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the admirable methods of using the mother tongue in the public schools of Germany is to put it into the mouth of a strong, vigorous teacher, who is a man. I believe there is a distinct gain all along the line, in character and in behavior, when the discipline is of that firm and masculine sort which gives so wholesome a tone to some of the schools of Germany.

In one of the admirable reports of our Commissioner of Education he refers to the fortunate lack of necessity in the German schools for frittering away the strength of the teacher in discipline, and he attributes this, rightly, I have no doubt, to the difference between the character of the German and the American boy. But this difference in character is partly due to the fact that in Germany the word of command is given by men—by strong, vigorous, masculine men. More men of the right sort in our public schools would render easier the work of the high-minded women, who are now endeavoring by pure strength of will and expenditure of nerve force to maintain a respectable standard of discipline in communities which do not really desire real discipline, where noble women literally wear their lives out on this vexed matter of discipline. Whereas in German schools, there is, apparently, no discipline. Discipline is not needed, *i. e.*, especial cases of discipline. The tone of the school-room is a continual discipline. One feels there that it would be impossible for the purpose of the school to be antagonized and the thoughts of teacher and pupils diverted from the proper work of the school because a single restless boy, with abounding vitality, has not been taught self-control. It would be the salvation of many an American boy to put him under wholesome influences of this kind. There is a moral training in moving about among boys accustomed to military discipline, accustomed to a formal and visible, to an (in our eyes) exaggerated courtesy to the teacher in charge, accustomed to obey at once and without question every requirement of the school life. Not that every male teacher in Germany meets this high ideal, but many of them do. Many Americans whose children have attended



the schools of Germany sigh on their return for the same rigorous, bracing and wholesome school atmosphere, for the equivalent of this German use of the mother tongue as a word of command in the mouths of forceful men.

But to return to the German use of the mother tongue, as exemplified in the reading book, by means of which we are told a knowledge of the language and a readiness in its use is developed. At the same time, this serves to enlarge the culture of the pupils, to develop their understanding, imagination and emotions, and to fill their hearts with love, admiration and appreciation for the great heroes of German literature, and to awaken in them a sound national feeling.

In England there is, as is well known, a strong sentiment that literature cannot be taught. Indeed, a young don of Christ Church College, Oxford, is credited with making recently the unanswerable argument: "Literature cannot be taught. I know, because I have tried it!" In a conversation with the distinguished historian, Edward A. Freeman, shortly before his death, he said to me: "Appreciation of literature is a matter of taste, and taste cannot be taught." He was, therefore, strongly opposed to the establishment of a chair of English literature at Oxford, an opposition which at the time was successful, though within a few months a proposition to establish a school of literature in the University of Oxford has been carried through one of the stages necessary. But in Germany other views prevail. Goethe said:

Denn bie den alten lieben Todten  
Braucht man Erklarung, will man Noten;  
Die Neuen glaubt man blank zu verstehen,  
Doch ohne Dolmetsch wird's auch nicht gehen.

The view of Goethe as to the necessity of interpreting the thought of modern masters, as well as that of the "Lieben Todten," is accepted in Germany, and we find in German universities lectures on the poetry of Tennyson and the prose of Carlyle, and a different conception in general of the function of literature. There is in Germany a heartier acceptance of literature as a teacher of righteousness, a guide to conduct. Hence we find patriotism taught by means of poetry, and love for fatherland expressly stated as the goal of instruction in the mother tongue. In a course of study for the kingdom of Saxony, we find these high words: "In making choice of these selections for youth, the guiding principle has been that the literature read serves, not alone for enriching the understanding but even more for awakening the imagination, for developing the love for nature and a sense of the beautiful, for strengthening religious feelings, the

moral character and a love for fatherland; in short, to make the soul of youth susceptible to all that is good and beautiful, and to fill it with enduring enthusiasm for the ideal view of life.

Such views of the function of literature, entertained by a people distinguished for love of order and system, have produced a well-planned, thoroughly digested method of teaching their own language and literature; the teaching of the mother tongue being so co-ordinated and articulated with the remaining branches of the school curriculum, that the literature receives help from each and gives help to all. Such a method we have not yet elaborated for our own English literature, such a method for the teaching of English we ought to have, and such a method we will have.



